



STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION
DIVISION OF MENTAL RETARDATION SERVICES
ANDREW JACKSON BUILDING
500 DEADERICK STREET, SUITE 1500
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Community Providers
Developmental Center Staff
Regional Office Staff
Central Office Staff

FROM: Stephen H. Norris, Deputy Commissioner
Division of Mental Retardation Services

DATE: April 30, 2009

SUBJECT: Communication on the Newly Identified Flu (referred to as Swine Flu Virus)

This communication was developed in response to how the Division of Mental Retardation Services (DMRS) is working with Tennessee Department of Health in order to be prepared to respond to the outbreak of the flu referred to as swine flu.

Human cases of the virus infection have been identified both in the United States and internationally. Recently, Tennessee has identified a suspected case in Williamson County.

It is likely more cases of this flu will be reported due to expanded testing and reporting from health care practitioners to their local health departments. DMRS in collaboration with the public health department is focusing on reducing transmission and illness severity, and providing common sense precautions.

This flu could pose serious problems for people with significant medical problems. There is no need to panic but prudent precautions should be made. DMRS is in close contact with Public Health who is working closely with the national CDC to keep current on what is going on and recommendations. This includes access to medications for treatment and possible vaccines. Everyone should begin by thinking of their own health and recommendations follow at the end of this communication. For the people we serve each agency should have a contingency plan which should address the following issues:

- Employees who are sick should not come to work. The agency may need to plan for backup in these situations. Service recipients who are sick should stay home and this should take precedence over current schedules; staffing problems should be discussed with the regional office.
- It is recommended that you contact the PCP for each service recipient in advance for advice for what to do for illness. It is NOT recommended to take people to the Emergency Room if this can be avoided. (The potential for infection is highest in this setting.)
- In general, one of the proven methods for decreasing infectious transmission is "social distancing". This means stay away from people (a distance of 3-6 feet between people is effective) and do not go to crowded areas. (Malls, concerts, movies, sports events, etc.) This may call for rethinking temporarily, community activities.
- It is not recommended, at the current time, to routinely treat the flu with antivirals. Do not press for medication if not recommended as there is a risk of creating resistant strains of the virus. Do not ask for prescriptions for "just in case." The state has adequate supplies for treatment and will release them if warranted.
- The news is showing people wearing masks to protect themselves. Guidelines posted this week by the federal Centers for Disease Control and prevention recommend that people avoid close contact and crowded conditions rather than relying on face masks for protection, but they also suggest that face masks might reduce risk if it's impossible to avoid crowds or people recently infected. Masks will not be effective for use by sick employees.

The CDC has likened our current situation to monitoring an approaching hurricane, not knowing when or if it will hit land or how serious it will be but taking the necessary precautions to be ready if needed. Our precautions at this time include attending closely to universal precautions, frequent hand washing, monitoring illness behaviors among ourselves and service recipients and making contingencies for future support as well as perhaps modifying current programming.

DMRS is in close contact with other state and federal agencies and will continue to update you on a regular basis.

Persons who think they may be ill with the flu or flu-like illness should contact their health care provider.

What are symptoms of the novel flu (referred to as swine flu)?

Symptoms of the illness are as follows:

- Fever
- Body aches
- Runny nose
- Sore throat
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed.

In **children**, **emergency warning signs** that need **urgent medical attention** include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In **adults**, **emergency warning signs** that need **urgent medical attention** include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

If you become ill and experience any warning signs, seek emergency medical care.

How is flu spread?

- The main way that influenza viruses are thought to be spread is from person to person in respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes. Flu virus may also be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets on another person or an object and then touches their own mouth or nose (or someone else's mouth or nose) before washing their hands.

What can I do to stop the spread of germs?

- The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends frequent hand washing with warm soapy water, keeping hands away from your face, eyes and mouth, and covering coughs and sneezes with a sleeve or tissue. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipers or gel sanitizers may be used. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands.
- People should stay home if they are sick so they don't spread the illness. Flu is highly contagious. Staying home can help reduce cases of flu and will help the person recover more quickly.
- When providing care to someone who is sick with the flu, the most important way to protect yourself and others who are not sick are to:
 - ✓ Keep the sick person away from other people as much as possible; keep the sick person in a room separate from the common areas of the home (for example a bedroom with its own bathroom, if that is possible);
 - ✓ Unless necessary for medical care, persons with the flu should not leave the home when they have a fever or during the time that they are most likely to

spread the infections to others (7 days after onset of symptoms in adults, and 10 days after onset of symptoms in children).

- ✓ Remind the sick person to cover their coughs, and clean hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub often, especially after coughing and/or sneezing, and use paper towels for drying hands.
- ✓ Have everyone in the household clean their hands often, using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.
- ✓ If possible, consideration should be given to maintaining good ventilation in shared household areas (for example, keeping windows open in bathrooms and kitchen).

What things as the caregiver can I do to prevent the spread of the flu virus?

- Avoid being face-to-face with the sick person.
- When holding small children who are sick, place their chin on your shoulder so that they will not cough in your face.
- Clean your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub after you touch the sick person or handle used tissues or laundry.
- Monitor yourself and household members for flu symptoms and contact a health care provider if symptoms occur.

Household cleaning, laundry and waste disposal

- Throw away tissues and other disposable items used by the sick person in the trash.
- Keep surfaces (especially bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom, and toys for children) clean by wiping them with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.
- Linens (bed sheets and towels) eating utensils, and dishes belonging to those who are sick do not need to be cleaned separately, but importantly, these items should not be shared without washing them first.
- Wash linens (such as bed sheets and towels) by using household soap and tumble dry on the hot setting. Avoid “hugging” laundry prior to washing it to prevent contaminating yourself. Clean your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based rub right after handling dirty laundry.
- Eating utensils should be washed either in a dishwasher or by hand with soap and water.

It is important to note that the illness cannot be contracted from eating foods, particularly pork or pork products.

DMRS is requiring all providers to report through the incident management system utilizing the reportable incident form all diagnosed (by a physician) cases of the flu (referred to as swine flu) of service recipients and staff. Staff should not be identified by name or social security number, but rather must include the agency name and location, region, and a unique number system for the person identified.

For more information about the current flu outbreak, visit the Tennessee Department of Health Web site at <http://health.state.tn.us/swineflu.htm>. Additional information is also available at the CDC's Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/>.

If you have any questions or need additional clarification, or would like the DMRS regional nursing consultant to assist you with technical assistance/education on this subject, please contact the following representative in your area.

Central Office:	Marlenia Overholt	615-253-6095
East Regional Office:	Danny Ricker	423-787-6757 Ext.148
Middle Regional Office:	Bill Feldhaus	615-231-5445
West Regional Office:	Linda Sain	901-745-7219

References: http://www.cdc.gov/germstopper/home_work_school.htm
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/habits.htm>
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/covercough.htm>
<http://news.tennesseeanyttime.org/node/1492>
<http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/>
<http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/guidance/>
http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/guidance_homecare.htm

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Quality Review Panel